

God Gives Us Strength for Our Journey - 1 Kings 19:4-8

In today's Old Testament, God's prophet Elijah decided that he was done. He had enough. He wanted to die. He says "It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers." God responded to Elijah's prayer by sending an angel who said to Elijah, "Arise and eat." Essentially the angel was saying to the prophet, "Stop feeling sorry for yourself. Get up and eat something! You have work to do!"

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear friends in Christ;

I think you know that the city of Detroit in the United States filed for Chapter 9 bankruptcy on July 18, 2013. It was the largest municipal bankruptcy filing in U.S. history. This bankruptcy affected the basic public services, declines in population, and significant urban blight, jobs were scarce. City services were so poor that police could take almost an hour to respond to emergency calls.

Jean Estell, 65, worked about three decades in Detroit's recreation and public works departments before retiring in 2004. Like other retirees, she lost part of her pension and all of her retiree health coverage in the bankruptcy settlement with creditors, and she is worried about her situation. Estell said she gets about \$63 less per month from her pension and now has to pay for her own health care. Prescription co-pays that once were \$3 now are \$25 for some of the roughly eight medications she takes, and her doctor visits cost more, too. "I do not go as often as I should. You get sick and you suffer through it," she said.

A former Detroit business owner Steve Brown, 58, said he once had 15 employees and contracted with Detroit to help repair streets. Now he works for his father's trucking company. The contract and the bulk of his work ended after the city entered bankruptcy. Brown said he considered switching over to demolition work, but had trouble getting a loan to buy the equipment. "I did not have enough funds to get started like I wanted to," he said.

Others who had suffered due to the bankruptcy are the city workers, including police and firefighters. They had their pay cut. Employees were forced to take unpaid days off.

Friends, sometimes you and I feel if we are on the verge of bankruptcy, as if our lives have been rocked to the very foundation, too. And in those times we need something to get us through, something to help us go on. We need what only God Himself can give us. And thankfully, as our text shows us today, our God is with us in all things to give us strength for the journey, to see us through all of life's ups and downs.

This passage about Elijah could be the story of any one of us. Only the name and the events themselves are different. Elijah had been called by God to be a prophet, a messenger to His people. In itself there is nothing spectacular in that, except that Elijah's ministry was conducted during the reign of Ahab, one of the most evil kings in all of Israel's history. At a time when more and more of God's chosen people were turning to the false gods of their pagan neighbours, when the king himself had built temples to Baal, Elijah was given the job of calling these people to repentance and back to the worship of the only true God.

This account comes right after the trial between the prophets of Baal and Elijah. He prayed and God sent fire from heaven to consume the offering of Elijah, proving that He and not the Baals was the true God. Elijah commanded that the people kill the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of the Asherah, the fertility goddesses. They did that because the law of Israel was that the false prophet should die.

Elijah ended a three-year drought by prayer, and outran the chariot of Ahab back to Jezreel in a feat of God-given prophetic activity. Of course, when Jezebel heard about the death of her favorite prophets, she promised Elijah - and, indeed, all of Israel - that she would settle for nothing less than his immediate death. So, Elijah ran for his life. He ran a day's worth out into the wilderness, and collapsed of exhaustion.

He came there because he was tired - tired of trying to show people the error of their ways, tired of seeing so little success in his ministry, tired of the sinfulness and unbelief that surrounded him. And we hear him say to God in our text: I have had enough, Lord. Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors. My life is such a mess, Lord. I have been faithful to you, and have proclaimed your word to your people. But nothing seems to be working. I am battle weary, Lord, and I do not have the strength to go on. Let me die and be at peace.

Have you ever felt that way? I believe most of us, at some point in our lives have felt so low that we have felt we would be better off dead. Nothing is working; nothing is going right. We work hard for things, only to see them fall apart around us. We invest in a nice home and take great pains in decorating it, only to have it destroyed in a fire. We work hard to get ahead in our job, only to lose it when the company goes out of business.

We plan, we work, we strive—and sometimes, no matter how hard we try, we still see things coming apart before our very eyes. And there are the days in this sin-filled world that just getting out of bed seems to be more effort than it is worth. We wonder how we are ever going to make it through, how we are ever going to be able to deal with all the problems, worries and troubles that we experience in life.

We find the strength to go on the same place that Elijah found it, in the gracious care and help of God. Because God does care and does want to help His downcast prophet, He sends an angel to give him bread and water, to give him physical nourishment, to give him strength for the journey ahead. It is just a simple act of caring on the part of God.

But this real food was special, for we are told that strengthened by that food, Elijah travelled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. This God-given food does more than simply nourish his body. This food gives him the power to go on. And that is how God works for all of us. When we find ourselves burdened by life, and weary of living, then He provides us with the nourishment we need, nourishment which gives us the strength to go on.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, so often, when people are struggling through the pains of this life or who are grieving in the face of death, we read to them the words of Psalm 23: ***The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul.***

Our Lord feeds us, nourishes us, and gives us the strength to go on, the strength to endure, the strength to overcome whatever we might experience in this world. Our strength for the journey comes through Jesus Christ, who undertook the hardest journey of all, when He journeyed down the way of sorrows that led to the cross. We see Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, praying for strength when He felt the burden of sorrow and shame that comes through sin—but not His sin. It was our sin, our sorrow, our pain that He carried to the cross, and which He took away from us once and for all through His sacrificial death for us.

In place of sin and its sorrow He gives us the strength of His forgiveness, and through His own resurrection He blesses us with the hope of new life, the life of perfect joy that lasts forever in the peace and bliss of heaven.

That living Lord, who gave Himself for us comes to us in many wonderful ways to give us strength for our journey. He gives us that strength in our baptism, where He works faith in our hearts and declares that we are His children. He gives us that strength in the Word, which assures us of His love and help. That is why Paul, in the midst of the struggles of His life could say: ***I can do everything through him who gives me strength.***

We find that strength in Holy Communion, where we eat and drink the very body and blood of Christ given for our forgiveness and for the spiritual strength it provides for our faith. And I believe that God gives us strength through the love and faith we share together as His people, which helps us to care for one another, to pray for one another and to support one another through the challenges of life, in the tough times of our journey.

When the bad times hit in your life; when you want to just quit and lay down and die, your Lord and God does have a plan for you. This is a true and faithful statement. But...what does this mean? Does it mean that life will no longer be rough? As a child of God living in this fallen and sinful world, there are going to be—rest assured—trials, tribulations, and pitfalls. There are going to be those times when you do want to just wander off the grid, disappear from sight and call out to God, asking that He would make the pain and suffering stop.

Friends: You do not get a pass or immunity from pain and suffering simply because you are a believer in Christ. When these things happen (and they will); cry out to your Lord and God in prayer. Call upon Him in times of trouble and He will deliver you. He hears you, and He will care for you, giving you exactly what you need.

However, do not be shocked or surprised when you are directed by God's faithful "everyday" common messengers: your family members, your coworkers, your friends, your neighbors...even a perfect stranger; messengers speaking Christ's Word to you, directing you right back here to be fed and nourished by Christ Himself with His eternal and life-giving gifts of Word, Water, Bread, and Wine—His gifts of life that He graciously showers down upon you in abundance each and every week until that blessed time when He does finally call you home to everlasting rest and peace in Him.

Until that blessed time, however; until that blessed heavenly homecoming, arise now and eat. Receive the very Bread of Life Himself in His Word and His Sacraments. Take and eat, for the forgiveness of all your sin...for the very gift of life itself. Amen

May this peace, which surpasses all human understanding, and which is inwardly-digested through faith alone, strengthen and preserve you—body and soul complete—now and into life everlasting.

Amen.